

to the attitude to be adopted towards the absurd? A review of the solutions which their philosophies offer to the problem is the third stage in the argument which leads Camus towards his answer.

None of them, he immediately perceives, has been faithful to it and maintained it in its true position as the *unique donnee*. If none commits suicide, thus removing its original cause, which was the intrusion of the human mind, all find some other way of destroying it. All become reconciled to the irrationality of the world and consent to see man's demand for the reasonable refused and his intellect humiliated. All take the rationally unjustifiable leap which enables them to transcend the antinomy between man and the world, and destroy the real tension of the absurd. Jaspers and Kierkegaard deify the absurd, Chestov identifies it with God, and all three thinkers, whatever their other differences, unite in worshipping the incomprehensible because of its mystery. Husserl and the phenomenologists illogically find absolute value in individual things, and thus restore the principle of explanation whose absence was at the very origin of the absurd. Camus refuses to follow these thinkers in their unjustifiable leap into reconciliation. It is because the universe is not explicable in human terms that the absurd exists. To offer, as a solution to the problem which it creates, an explanation of the universe which is by definition beyond the reach of human reason is unjustly to dismiss the absurd by altering the nature of the problem. 'For the absurd mind,' writes Camus in one of the phrases whose clarity and intensity mark him out as a writer among philosophers, 'reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason.' Camus adopts, on the plane of knowledge, the same refusal to accept that which is beyond his understanding as he will assume later towards the problem of suffering. He is already *l'homme revolte*, the rebel who justifies man and refuses an inhuman world.

- accepting the absurd

> explaining the absurd in irrational terms after the nature of the problem

Thus, there is no way of escaping the absurd

→ It can only be accepted

The same intellectual rigour which caused Camus to criticize irrational evasions of the absurd also brings him to reject physical suicide. Human destiny, with all its contradictions, must be accepted as it is and life must be lived in accordance with this acceptance. 'Now man will not live out his destiny, knowing it to be absurd, unless he does everything to keep present in his mind the absurdity which his consciousness has revealed. To deny one of the terms of this opposition is to escape from it... Living consists of keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is essentially a question of looking at it. Unlike Eurydice, the absurd dies only when one looks away.' In his first important piece of philosophical writing, Camus exalts the value of consciousness which is one of the oldest parts of the humanist tradition. Although Meursault seems to be above all lacking in awareness, he is nevertheless living out his absurd destiny in accordance with the ideas which Camus expresses in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He reveals his reasons only at the very end of the book. His apathy is justified in his outburst of refusal of the chaplain's prayers.

Live know and accept the absurd

Nothing, nothing at all had any meaning and I knew why. He knew why as well. From the far off depths of my future, during the whole of this absurd life that I had led, a dark breath rose towards me, blowing through the years which had not yet come, bringing with it an equal insignificance to the no more real years that I was living through. What did other people's death matter, what did love for my mother matter, what did his god matter, what did the choice between different lives matter, since one fate would single me out and together with me the thousand million others who, as he did, said they were my brothers?

For Meursault the absurd is essentially the result of his awareness of his own mortality, of the 'bloodstained mathematics which dominate the human lot'. He is the 'everyday man' described in *The Myth of Sisyphus* who, before his consciousness of the absurd, had projects, hopes, ambitions, the belief that he was free to order his life, but who has realized that 'all that is disproved in one breathtaking sweep by the absurdity of a possible death'.

Meursault's apathy and indifference to the normal reasons for living were thus explained by one aspect of the idea of the absurd which Camus expressed in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Further light was thrown upon his reasons for remaining alive and the nature of his final revolt against death by the development of Camus's arguments. The absurd frees man from all feeling of responsibility, annihilates the future and leaves only one certainty—the